

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION
MID PACIFIC REGION
SACRAMENTO CA**

MAY 2007

**DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
STANISLAUS RIVER SALMONID SPAWNING GRAVEL
ADDITION 2007**

Prepared by: _____ Date: _____
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Recommended: _____ Date: _____
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Approved: _____ Date: _____
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FONSI No.

BACKGROUND

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) in May 2007 to evaluate the effects of adding spawning gravel to the Stanislaus River near Knights Ferry Bridge.

The purpose of the action is to replenish spawning gravel at existing and new restoration sites in the Lower Stanislaus River near Knights Ferry Bridge to increase and improve Chinook salmon, steelhead, and native rainbow trout spawning habitat. The need of the action derives from the declines of salmonid stocks due in part to loss of spawning habitat through curtailment of gravel recruitment due to blockage of the river channel by dams.

Work will start in the summer of 2007 and continue yearly up to 5 years as funding allows through the permitted period. Work would be conducted within a reach of the river that is 5,700 feet long. The actual gravel placement work would occur in a much smaller total reach of the river. The specific placement would cover up to approximately eight sites (created riffles) for a total reach length of placed gravel to be about 900 feet of the river within the 5,700 foot long reach. The acres of streambed to be affected would be approximately 1.7 acres over the life of the project.

The method of addition will most likely be by front end loader. If access to a specific spot is difficult, Reclamation may potentially use the habitat builder system.

FINDINGS

According to the National Environmental Policy Act and consistent with the EA, the Mid-Pacific Regional Office of Reclamation has determined that the proposed action is not a major Federal action that will significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not required for carrying out the proposed action.

The following factors support this determination:

1. The proposed action will not significantly affect water quality. Turbidity downstream from the project site will be kept to a minimum during construction. Only a temporary increase in turbidity is expected. River flows at the time of construction will be low enough (approximately 200 to 500 cfs.) to allow disturbed fine sediment to quickly settle out of the water column.

Equipment access, maintenance, refueling, parking and staging areas will be identified in consultation with U. S. Corps of Engineers (COE) personnel prior to project construction. Construction specifications will prohibit any equipment in or near the river which might affect water quality. Project construction will be regularly monitored by DFG personnel to help insure environmental compliance.

2. The proposed action will not affect threatened or endangered terrestrial species. Prior to using heavy equipment on access routes to the river or laying pipe from the staging area to the river, Reclamation will conduct a site survey to identify and flag any elderberry bushes. The routes will avoid damage to any elderberry bushes. If circumstances change and the project may affect the valley elderberry longhorn beetle, Reclamation will consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service. No other sensitive species were found at the areas to be disturbed. A seasonal wetland at the southwest end of the project area may be potential habitat for the California tiger salamander, but it will be flagged or fenced and avoided during construction.

3. The proposed action will not adversely affect threatened or endangered fish. The placement of gravel will occur from June 30 to September 1, before the spawning season and after the incubation period for steelhead trout and salmon. The temporary increase in turbidity will not affect fish. The placement of gravel would increase the amount of and improve existing salmon and trout spawning habitat.

4. The proposed action will not significantly affect other biological resources. Existing access roads will be used and staging of material will occur in site previously disturbed with compacted soil.

The seasonal wetland will be flagged and avoided during gravel placement. Riparian vegetation will be avoided or minimally trimmed. A total of 0.08 acres of willows and one tree will be removed.

5. The proposed action will not significantly affect recreation. Work will not be done on weekends, when most rafting occurs. Signs will be placed to alert the public, including river rafters, about the gravel placement.

6. The proposed action will not significantly affect cultural resources. Reclamation archeologists will complete a field survey in late spring or early summer 2007. Reclamation will consult with the State Historic Preservation Office. Any historic properties eligible for the National Register would be protected throughout the duration of the project.

In the event of an unanticipated discovery of unknown cultural resources during the project activities, work would be suspended in the area until the find can be assessed by a qualified archaeologist and implement avoidance, preservation, or recovery measures as appropriate prior to any work resuming at that specific location.

7. The proposed action will not significantly increase traffic, noise, or air emissions.

8. The proposed action will not affect any Indian Trust Assets.

9. The proposed action will not disproportionately impact minority and disadvantaged populations or communities.